

## Newsletter Winter 2010

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# HEALTHY KIDS BETTER STUDENTS

**MASSACHUSETTS  
COORDINATED  
SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM**

**H**ello and welcome to the winter edition of the Coordinated School Health (CSH) newsletter! In each issue of our seasonal newsletters, we focus on one topic relating to school health concerns—including the latest research, success stories and action steps for schools. This issue highlights nutrition. At present, one in four Massachusetts adolescents is either overweight or obese—conditions which are linked to a multitude of serious health, social and emotional problems. By educating students about nutrition and providing them with healthy food choices at school, we can do our part to help reverse this epidemic.

If you have any questions about our program or need assistance implementing Coordinated School Health or Wellness Policies, please contact us.

Thanks and have a healthy day!

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*A partnership of the  
Massachusetts Departments  
of Elementary and Secondary  
Education and Public Health.*



## Coordinated School Health (CSH):

CSH is a joint initiative between the Massachusetts Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education and Public Health funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Adolescent and School Health (CDC/DASH). Our team's primary goal is to improve school policies, environment and instruction relating to physical activity, nutrition and tobacco. Research shows that improvement in these areas not only contributes to the healthy development of students but to their academic success as well.

In order to accomplish these goals, we promote the Coordinated School Health model as an approach where all school health-related activities are integrated within the school and community in an effort to enhance the health and academic outcomes of students. This model provides a framework for creating linkages between nine existing components:

*Health Education - Physical Education - Health Services  
Food and Nutrition Services - Counseling, Psychological and Social Services  
Safe and Healthful School Environment - Health Promotion for Staff  
Family/Community Involvement - Family and Consumer Sciences Education*

CSH staff provide training, technical assistance and resources to schools to promote the healthy development of Massachusetts youth. Additionally, CSH collects the biannual School Health Profiles surveys on health-related programs in Massachusetts middle and high schools and works to increase coordination among state-level agencies and organizations working in school health. To learn more about CSH, please visit [www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/CSHP](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/CSHP).

## Getting Up to Speed on Nutrition

Nutrition education was one key element in the School Wellness Policies required by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. But teachers also need sound and current training to help students understand the principles of healthy eating and nutrition. A collaboration between the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) and Framingham State College is making it easy for health teachers and others to strengthen their background in nutrition. Subsidized by ESE, Framingham State offers convenient online courses in nutrition for teachers, school nutrition directors, food service workers and other school staff.

Some of Framingham State's online nutrition courses have explored the childhood obesity epidemic, eating disorders, and incorporating nutrition and physical activity lessons into middle school classrooms. A course focusing on hydration and beverages has been especially popular with physical education teachers. Another course, developed by Framingham State specifically for Massachusetts school staff, is "Food, Culture, and Community," in which participants visit a local ethnic grocery and engage in online discussions about the different "foodways" of ethnic groups represented in their school's student population. With an increased understanding of the culturally favored foods and eating patterns of their diverse students, teachers are better able to tailor nutrition education lessons to their own students.

Framingham State's four-week online courses are offered in March, July and October. For more information on upcoming online nutrition courses for educators, see [www.framingham.edu/dgce/opdce/](http://www.framingham.edu/dgce/opdce/).



## Research Update

## Rethinking School Food Environments

Over the past decade, many studies have evaluated the impact of school food environments and policies on student nutrition. Research confirms that when schools replace unhealthy foods and beverages in their cafeterias and vending machines with healthy items, students eat better<sup>1</sup>. Further evidence suggests a relationship between the school food environment and student Body Mass Index (BMI)<sup>2</sup>. For example, one study showed that elementary schools offering fried potato products and desserts in school meals more than once a week had a higher likelihood of obesity among students. The study further demonstrated that the availability of low-nutrient, energy-dense foods in vending machines was associated with higher BMIs in middle school students<sup>3</sup>.

Massachusetts schools in recent years have made great strides in reducing the availability of junk foods on campus. From 2002 to 2008, the percentage of middle and high schools permitting the sale of candy in vending machines or school stores dropped from 41% to 15%, and the percentage permitting the sale of full-fat salty snacks such as potato chips fell from 68% to 29%. Dramatic reductions can also be seen in the sale of soda and sports drinks in schools throughout the state.

However, work still needs to be done. Each school's health council/wellness committee should evaluate its school nutrition policy and ensure that it prohibits the use of food as a reward, offers and promotes healthy foods (such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and low fat dairy), and decreases or eliminates the availability of foods high in fat, calories and sugar. To be truly effective, the policy should cover foods served at school parties, concession stands and fundraising events in addition to more traditional outlets such as school meals, a la carte, school stores and vending machines. Finally, it is important to provide parents with information to increase their knowledge of nutrition so they can support the school's efforts at home.

For more information on nutrition policies and standards, please visit the following websites:

**USDA Food and Nutrition Service**

[www.fns.usda.gov/fns/nutrition.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/nutrition.htm)

**Institute of Medicine**

[www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/30181/42502.aspx](http://www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/30181/42502.aspx)

**School Nutrition Association**

[www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=8480&terms=guidelines](http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=8480&terms=guidelines)

**John C. Stalker Institute of Food and Nutrition**

[www.johnstalkerinstitute.org/vending%20project/healthysnacks.htm](http://www.johnstalkerinstitute.org/vending%20project/healthysnacks.htm)



(1) Mary Story, James F. Sallis, C. Tracy Orleans. Adolescent Obesity: Towards Evidence-Based Policy and Environmental Solutions. J Adolesc Health. 2009;45:S1-S5.

(2) Terry-McElrath YM, O'Malley PM, Delva J, et al. The school food environment and student body mass index and food consumption: 2004 to 2007 national data. J Adolesc Health. 2009;45:S45-S56.

(3) Fox MK, Dodd AH, Wilson A, Gleason PM. Association between school food environment and practices and body mass index of US public school children. J Am Diet Assoc. 2009;109(suppl 1):S108-S117.



# Massachusetts Success Stories: Nutrition

## Playing to Win: Students Embrace Healthy Eating in Lawrence, MA

Arlington Middle School in Lawrence is taking steps to promote lifelong healthy eating and physical activity habits at school. And much to the surprise of some staff, students have had positive reactions to the initiative.

Under the leadership of Principal Juan Rodriguez, Assistant Principal Robin Finn, and Food Service Director Anne Marie Stronach, Arlington Middle School is implementing the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. This program is designed to provide students with an extra serving of fruit and vegetable during the morning as well as to introduce different kinds of fruits and vegetables that students typically wouldn't try. One unique aspect of this initiative is the ease in which it can be incorporated into academics. To connect the tasting to the curriculum, the teachers are designing writing and mathematics content lessons around the program. Once a week, students write about the featured fruit or vegetable. At the end of the week, the class creates a graph based on one aspect of the various fruits or vegetables, such as likes, dislikes, colors and textures.

This program partners with Jeannie Barnek from the UMass Nutrition Education Extension Program, classroom teachers and the school's Nutrition Service Department. Teachers are delightfully surprised to see students interacting with raw red and green peppers, arugula and bok choy along with student favorites such as grapes and melons. One staff member noted that the students "are more likely than we are to try something new!"

With the support of Acting Superintendent Dr. Mary Lou Bergeron and Sherri Doucette of New England Dairy & Food Council, the school also actively pursued the opportunity to become a participant in the National Dairy Council's partnership with National Football League's Fuel Up to Play 60 program. This youth-led program allows students and adults to collaborate in identifying new and creative ways to offer more nutrient-rich foods—such as low fat dairy foods, whole grains, fruits and vegetables—and encourages 60 minutes of physical activity daily.

Fuel Up to Play 60 allows students to assess the school environment and implement programs to make the school a healthier place. At Arlington Middle School, the student team chose to improve the school breakfast program and build on an afterschool walking club. The walking club, which also organizes the school's wellness fair, includes students, teachers and other community members. The range of participants is in line with Fuel Up to Play 60's goal to engage the entire community. Additionally, Fuel Up to Play 60 includes an online program allowing students to track their daily healthy behaviors. By tracking those behaviors, students can earn points, win prizes, play interactive games and take quizzes to keep motivated.

To kick off Fuel Up to Play 60, the student leadership team hosted an event on October 14th. The students pledged to

treat their bodies right by fueling up with healthy foods and exercising every day. The event also featured several physical activity stations such as dancing, push-ups and tug-of-war, as well as a "milk mustache" making booth. The highlight of the event was a visit from New England Patriots mascot Pat Patriot and the Lawrence High Football Team, who cheered the students' commitment to healthier living and validated the importance of eating right and being active.

Arlington Middle School is creating an unprecedented focus on wellness throughout the entire school community, leaving no resources behind. All schools have a Wellness Policy and this school lives it because they value the impact it has on learning!

## Tasty Choices: in Cambridge, MA

For the next two years, all incoming ninth graders in the Cambridge public school system will be attending classes in an off-campus building while their high school, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS), is being renovated. A team of school nutritionists from the Cambridge Public Health Department and school food service staff have welcomed the opening of the CRLS freshman campus as an opportunity to try out new dishes and experiment with a new "food court" serving style.

With input from students, the team designed the cafeteria so that diners could travel freely among six "serving stations." The stations include a full salad bar, a hot entrée station, a pizza station, a self-serve fresh soup and chili bar, a hot sandwich station, and a "grab and go" refrigerated case with fresh salads, wraps, yogurt and fresh fruit. At least one vegetarian option is available every day.

When the cafeteria opened in September, many students were overwhelmed by the array of choices and stations, and tended to

take the first items they came to. But once students got the hang of the new system, kitchen staff had to scramble to keep up with demand.

Many of the most popular entrees and side dishes served in the ninth grade cafeteria were introduced into the Cambridge Public Schools cafeteria menus over the past four years by the *Tasty Choices* program, a collaboration between the health department's school nutritionists and school food service personnel. *Tasty Choices* recipes, made from scratch in school kitchens, emphasize fresh (and sometimes locally grown) fruit and vegetables; whole grain breads, pasta, and brown rice; and lower fat and lower sodium options.

The ninth grade cafeteria continues to receive high marks from students. Among students' favorite dishes are the homemade chili and soups, chicken Caesar salad wraps, salads, and fresh roasted potatoes. One enthusiastic teen and his buddies recently stopped a school nutritionist to thank her for "all the great food here." And they were not alone. The same school nutritionist received resounding applause from 400 freshmen at the school orientation when introducing the new cafeteria.

For more information about the ninth grade cafeteria or the *Tasty Choices* program, please contact Dawn Olcott at [dolcott@challiance.org](mailto:dolcott@challiance.org) or 617-665-3809.

## The Right Start: School Breakfast in Medford, MA

Research has shown that school breakfast can positively impact student behavior, attendance and learning capability. As a result, the Medford Public Schools Food Service Department decided to offer universal free breakfast at the Columbus Elementary School. With 53% of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals, the school felt the program was needed—despite the fact that it does not meet the eligibility requirements for additional state universal breakfast reimbursement. However, working in conjunction with

the Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread, the school found that if student breakfast participation was over a certain level, the program would be self-sustaining.

In the fall of 2008, Jeanne Irwin, Director of Food Services; Bridget Collins, Professional Chef/Nutrition Coordinator for Medford Public Schools; Principal Joan Yaeger; Assistant Principal Ronda Brenner; and Justine Kahn, Director of Child Nutrition Outreach at Project Bread, began meeting to discuss how to implement the program. Additionally, they discussed the importance of serving healthy foods to the students. In the past, Medford Public Schools had served five-ounce white flour bagels with cream cheese, donuts and full sugar cereals for breakfast, but chef Bridget Collins created a new, healthier menu that has since been adopted district wide. The menu focuses on whole grains, low- or reduced-sugar cereals, whole or dried fruit, hand-sweetened yogurt and homemade granola. Every effort is made to prepare the foods in the school kitchens so that ingredients, nutrients and sugar levels can be controlled. In order to make the foods more appealing to students, Collins uses honey, brown sugar or fruit juice as sweeteners instead of white refined sugar.

In February 2009, with a good deal of publicity from Principal Yaeger, the school began offering breakfast to students in their classrooms when they arrived at school. The teachers were wonderfully supportive in distributing and tracking these breakfasts.

The Universal Breakfast Program was not an easy program for the school to execute. Food service staff have to work extra hours preparing breakfasts for distribution the next day, and the project has required a daily coordinated effort from food service staff, custodians and school administrators.

Within two weeks of the start date, however, positive feedback began to roll into the food service department from many different sources. The school nurse, Karen Roberto, noticed a significant decline in the number of students in her office "complaining of stomach pains and headaches." Both the principal and vice principal noted a decrease in discipline issues and tardiness, and an increase in attendance. Teachers reported that students were better behaved, more attentive and participated more in class.

For all involved, the Universal Breakfast Program has been an extremely gratifying venture, and has delivered benefits above and beyond the actual nutritional benefits for the children.

Do you have a success story in the areas of nutrition, physical education/activity, tobacco, or other health issues or coordination in your school? If so, we'd love to hear from you so we can feature your story in an upcoming newsletter and inspire others. Please email your successes to [Laura.York@state.ma.us](mailto:Laura.York@state.ma.us)



# New Health Hints Database

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Massachusetts Department of Public Health recently launched a new Health Hints database! Health Hints are a collection of short, grade-appropriate messages (K-12) on different health topics ranging from asthma to violence prevention. Many of the Health Hints provide suggestions for extending those messages into the classroom and the home. These messages and activities can be used to support a school's overall health environment and reinforce the comprehensive health education being taught to students. School personnel can select any of the hints to feature in school newsletters, menus, Web pages and other communications used throughout the school and/or community. We look forward to your ideas for additional Health Hints that could be used in schools across the Commonwealth.

Please visit <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/hprograms/hints> to view existing Health Hints and submit your own.

## Are you on the list?

Every week, our program sends out a variety of school health-related resources and information such as new health research, professional development offerings and grant opportunities. If you are not on our listserv, please send an email to [CMilligan@doe.mass.edu](mailto:CMilligan@doe.mass.edu) and ask to be added. Also, if you have any school health dilemmas and would like input from other members, feel free to send your questions to the above email to be forwarded to the group.



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